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ABSTRACT

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Objectivism in Information Utilization: Theory and Measurement

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Abstract

A self-report scale was constructed and validated that measures individual differences in objectivism--the tendency to base one's judgments and beliefs upon empirical information and rational considerations. Validity data showed that, compared to people who score low on the Objectivism Scale, highly objective individuals enjoy thinking more, rely more upon observable facts when making decisions, and place less emphasis upon subjective and intuitive styles of decision-making. Among graduate students in psychology, objectivism correlated positively with ratings of research-oriented careers, but negatively with ratings of mental health careers; also, highly objective students were more critical of nonobjective psychological assessment techniques and placed greater importance upon research. Objectivism also predicted preferences for newspaper articles, college course selections, and the criteria respondents use when making decisions.

Objectivism in Information Utilization: Theory and Measurement

Research on cognitive styles has investigated several individual difference variables that reflect ways of perceiving, organizing, and processing information (Goldstein & Blackman, 1978). Most of the charateristics studied in this research involve either cognitive abilities (such as field independence) or nonability congnitive styles (such as category width). However, people differ not only in their cognitive abilities and in their styles of thinking, but also in the kinds of information upon which they base their judgments and beliefs.

One of the most important dimensions on which decisions vary is in terms of "objectivity." As used here, an objective decision is a judgment that is based upon data or facts that are empirical (observable by anyone in the same place at the same time) and that excludes the consideration of data or facts that are not empirical, and that is based upon rational and logical considerations. Thus, an objective individual is one who seeks empirical information under conditions of uncertainty and attempts to process it in a rational and logical fashion. It should be noted that objective and subjective do not represent opposite ends of a single bipolar continuum. Although all subjective information (such as individuals' feelings and intuitions) is, by definition, nonobjective (i.e., it is not observable by everyone), nonobjective information is not necessarily subjective. Thus, we will use the term "nonobjective" rather than "subjective" as the opposite of objective.

The importance of individual differences in objective versus nonobjective styles of decision-making has been demonstrated in several areas, including managerial effectiveness (Hawkins, Roffman, & Osborne, 1978; Mintzberg, 1975; Sproull & Zubrow, 1981), decision-making (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Mintzberg, 1975), selection of college majors (Goldschmid, 1967), and social perception (Giannini, Daood, Giannini, Boniface, and Rhodes, 1978). Although studies such as these have alluded to individual differences in the tendency to be "objective," few attempts have been made to measure and study objective and nonobjective cognitive styles directly.

The most extensive work dealing with people's orientations toward information has been based upon Jung's (1923) theory of psychological type. According to Jung, individual differences in behavior are dependent upon differences in the ways that people "perceive" (become aware of stimuli) and "judge" (draw conclusions about them). Research on Jung's typology has been based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which classifies respondents as one of 16 discrete types (Myers, 1975). As predicted by the theory, individuals classified as different types prefer to make decisions in different ways and on the basis of different information (see McCaulley, 1981).

Although Jung's thinking-feeling and sensing-intuition types differ in the degree to which they process information objectively (Jung, 1923), the MBTI does not assess objectivity per se. Further, work on Jungian types is based on a strict typology. As noted earlier, we dispute the fact that

objective and subjective modes of thinking are opposite ends of a single dimension. An individual may be facile in either, both, -or neither objective and subjective styles of thinking. However, the forced choice nature of the MBTI forces an inverse relationship between objective (thinking/sensing/judging) and subjective (feeling/intuiting/perceiving) types. An additional problem with the MBTI is its length; the research version of the scale contains 126 items, which often exceeds both the time and patience of research subjects; a shorter measure of the preference for objective styles of cognition would be more useful in many research contexts.

In light of the importance of individual differences in the preference for objective and nonobjective styles of thinking and the lack of a measure of such differences, our goal was to construct and validate a short, self-report measure of the objective cognitive style.

Scale Construction

Two characteristics dominated our conception of an "objective" individual: a tendency to seek empirically-derived information under conditions of uncertainty and a tendency to emphasize logical and rational considerations when making decisions and forming beliefs. Twenty-seven items that tapped these characteristics were administered to a sample of 178 undergraduate and graduate students and the "weakest" items--those with an item-total correlation of less than .20--were discarded. The remaining 18 items were then administered to a second sample of 166 undergraduates and graduates. Items from this set were retained that correlated at least .35 with the sum

of all other items. As a set, these 11 items demonstrated acceptable internal consistency; Cronbach's alpha was .80.

Administering these items to a third sample of 60 subjects revealed acceptably high item-total correlations (r's > .35) and interitem reliability (alpha = .83), indicating that further "fine-tuning" of the scale was unnecessary. The final Objectivism Scale, shown in Table 1, consists of 11 items, six of which are positively worded.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Construct Validity

Four-hundred and sixteen undergraduate and graduate students completed the Objectivism Scale along with one or more of the following measures: the Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982), the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers, 1975), Blass' (1974) Objectivity-Subjectivity Scale, the Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975), and an 11-item ad hoc "subjectivism" scale. The rationale for using each measure as evidence of construct validity will be noted as we discuss each in turn. The means, standard deviations and interitem reliabilities for each of these measures are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 About Here

Need for Cognition

The Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982) is a 30-item scale that measures the tendency to engage in and enjoy thinking. Compared to people who score low on the scale, high scorers report that they enjoy thinking, are more likely to be employed in professions that require a great deal of thought, and prefer complex rather than simple cognitive tasks. In light of this, it would be expected that Need for Cognition would correlate positively with Objectivism, which it does, $r = +.47$, $p < .001$.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI; Myers, 1975) is a measure of individual differences in the ways in which people use perception and judgment. When scored as originally designed, scores on eight "subscales" classify respondents as one of 16 discrete types. However, because we dispute that objective and subjective modes of thought are dichotomous, we correlated each "subscale" score with objectivism rather than classifing respondents into types.

Thinking-Feeling. This dimension reflects the degree to which people make judgments objectively and impersonally (Thinking) as opposed to subjectively and personally, emphasizing feelings and values (Feeling). The expected relationship between the Thinking and Feeling subscores is straightforward and obvious. As expected, objectivism correlated positively with Thinking scores ($r = +.27$, $p < .001$) and negatively with Feeling scores ($r = -.29$, $p < .001$).

Sensing-Intuition. Sensing scores reflect the degree to

which people prefer to perceive the immediate, real, and practical facts in their experience; Intuition refers to the tendency to experience life in a manner that emphasizes meanings, possibilities, and relationships. To the degree that highly objective individuals rely upon empirical observables when making decisions and forming beliefs, a positive correlation between objectivism and Sensing was predicted, and was supported by the data, $r = +.17$, $p < .03$. Conversely, as expected, objective individuals tend not to be Intuitive, $r = -.24$, $p < .002$.

Judging-Perceiving. The distinction between Judging and Perceiving reflects the degree to which an individual prefers to live in a planned and orderly fashion by controlling events (Judgment) as opposed to living in a spontaneous, flexible, and adaptive manner (Perception). We reasoned that objective individuals would be more likely to live in a controlled, planned fashion; indeed, their reliance upon objective modes of cognition might stem from a need for order and control. The positive correlation between Judging scores and objectivism supports this line of reasoning ($r = +.38$, $p < .001$), as does the negative correlation between Perception and objectivism ($r = -.41$, $p < .001$).

Extraversion-Introversion. Of the four dimensions measured by the MBTI, extraversion-introversion (the tendency to focus one's interest and attention on the external world versus on the inner world of concepts and ideas) bears the weakest conceptual connection to objectivism. Thus, it is not surprising that Objectivism correlates with neither Extraversion nor Introversion scores.

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Subjectivism. People who prefer objective modes of cognition should be less inclined to approach decisions and beliefs subjectively. To test this, we developed an 11-item ad hoc measure of subjectivism which contained items such as "I often make decisions based upon my feelings" and "I think that making decisions without taking one's inner feelings into account is unwise." Although no independent evidence regarding the validity of this measure exists, the scale has acceptable interitem reliability (.72). As expected, scores on the subjectivism measure correlated negatively with objectivism, $r = -.32$, $p < .005$.

Self-Consciousness. The Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein et al., 1975) assesses the degree to which people think about themselves. To the degree that objective people are externally oriented (i.e., toward empirical information), objectivism should correlate negatively with private self-consciousness (the tendency to focus on internal, private aspects of oneself), but positively with public self-consciousness (the tendency to focus on external, public aspects of oneself and upon others' reactions). This expectation was confirmed for public self-consciousness ($r = +.22$, $p < .01$), but not for private self-consciousness ($r = +.09$, ns).

Objectivity-Subjectivity. Our search of the literature uncovered only one measure purportedly designed to measure "objectivity" -- Blass' (1974) Objectivity-Subjectivity Scale. However, Blass' measure resembles ours in name only. His scale assesses respondents' reactions to imbalanced interpersonal

relationships, such as when two of an individual's best friends dislike one another. Blass reasoned that "subjective" individuals would be bothered more by such imbalances because they allow irrelevant, subjective criteria to enter into their evaluations. Given substantial differences in the way in which we and Blass conceptualize objectivity, it was not possible to predict whether the two scales would be correlated. The data showed objectivism scores to be uncorrelated with Blass' scale, $r = -.02$, ns.

Summary of construct validity data. Correlations with other measures provides convergent evidence for the validity of the Objectivism Scale. (The correlations are shown in the righthand column of Table 2.) Objectivism correlated positively with Need For Cognition, with the Thinking, Sensing, and Judging subscales of the MBTI, and with public self-consciousness. Negative correlations were obtained with the Feeling, Intuition, and Perceiving scores on the MBTI and with an ad hoc measure of subjectivism. Taken together, these data portray the highly Objective person as cognitively-oriented, preferring rational modes of thought using externally-derived inputs over more subjective modes of thinking that rely on feelings and intuition.

Social desiriability. One-hundred and fourty one undergraduate students completed the Objectivism Scale and the Crowne and Marlowe (1964) Social Desirability Scale. Scores on the Objectivism Scale correlated +.18 with those on the Marlowe-Crowne, $p < .05$. Thus, there is a slight tendency for socially desirable response biases to contribute to responding on the Objectivism Scale.

Criterion Validity Studies

Five studies were undertaken to examine the criterion validity of the Objectivism Scale.

Career Chocies in Psychology

Jobs differ in the degree to which employees deal predominately with information that is objective or nonobjective. For example, engineers and computer programmers work primarily with information that is objective, whereas ministers and social workers rely upon information that is less so. Thus, people's career choices may reflect, in part, the degree to which they prefer to utilize objective information. Within psychology, it was predicted that objectivism would predict respondents' preferences for jobs that rely on objective styles of decision-making that use empirically-derived information, such as research, as opposed to those that rely more on subjective information and thought, such as counseling.

Method. Sixty-nine first and second year graduate students served as subjects. All subjects were enrolled in a graduate department that consisted of six programs. Three of the programs were academic and research-oriented (cognitive, social-personality-developmental, and statistics-psychometrics areas), and three were professional programs (Ph.D. programs in counseling and school psychology and a Master's program in counseling). Respondents were contacted individually and asked to complete an anonymous survey of "career choices in psychology."

The questionnaire first asked subjects to rate the degree to which they would like to pursue each of several careers open to

psychologists: college or university teaching, research, statistics, counseling, consulting, testing and assessment, program evaluator, training, and industrial-organizational psychology. Ratings were done on 7-point scales ranging from "I would strongly dislike..." to "I would strongly like this career." Respondents then rated the validity of six psychological assessment techniques on 5-point scales ("totally invalid and useless" to "extremely valid and useful"). Three of these techniques were selected to represent "objective" modes of measurement (personality inventories, behavioral observation, and intelligence tests) and three were selected because they were less objective; i.e., they require the test administrator to interpret the responses to a higher degree (projective tests, association tasks, and structured interviews). Respondents were then asked "To what degree do you think it is important for professional psychologists to base their interventions on research findings?" The last portion of the questionnaire consisted of the Objectivism Scale.

Results. As predicted, students in the research-oriented, academic programs scored higher in objectivism (M = 46.3) than those in the professional programs (M = 41.5), t .67) = 2.72, $p < .01$. A median split was performed on the objectivism scores (Mdn = 42) and subjects were classified as low or high in objectivism. Analyses of career preferences showed that, compared to students who scored low in objectivism, highly objective students expressed a strongerp reference for careers in college and university teaching and research (t-values and means

are shown in Table 3). On theother hand, less objective students rated careers in counseling and training more highly than students scoring high on the scale. (The effects for statistician and consultant also approached significance, p's < .10).

Further, although high and low objectivism students did not differ in their ratings of "objective" assessment techniques, low objectivism students rated the less objective methods as more valid and useful (M =9.7) than did highly objective students (M = 8.8), t (67) = 1.82, p < .05. Finally, highly objective students indicated that it was more important for professional psychologists to base interventions on research findings (M = 3.5) than less objective students (M = 2.9), t (67) = 2.64, p < .005.

In short, objectivism scores predicted students' career interests, evaluations of psychological assessment methods, the importance they placed on research, and the program in which they were enrolled.

Insert Table 3 About Here

Preference for Objective and Nonobjective Information

Central to our conceptualization of objectivism is the tendency to prefer objective sources of information. The studies below were designed to demonstrate that objectivism scores are related to preferences for objective information.

Newspaper headlines. Newspaper articles differ in the

degree to which they report on objective topics. We expected to find that, compared to people low in objectivism, people who scored high in objectivism would be more likely to read articles about objective topics, but less likely to read articles about nonobjective topics.

Sixty undergraduates who had completed the Objectivism Scale were given 20 newspaper headlines and were asked to rate on a 5-point scale how likely they would be to read each article. Ten of the headlines dealt with objective topics (e.g., "Satellite provides new information on black holes) whereas the other 10 reflected less objective stories (e.g., "Pets bring happiness to shut-ins"). (Prior to the study, five judges had rated each of 60 newspaper headlines for "objectivity" and those scoring lowest and highest were selected for use in the study.)

As predicted, a positive correlation was obtained between objectivism scores and the likelihood that subjets would read the articles dealing with objective topics, $r = .23$, $p < .05$. However, objectivism did not predict interest in less objective articles, $r = .09$, ns.

Course selection. The same undergraduates were also presented with 20 course titles taken from the university catalog. Half of these had been rated as courses dealing with highly objective subjects (e.g., Cellular biology) whereas the others were judged to reflect less objective topics (e.g., Basic approaches to appreciating works of art). Subjects were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale the degree to which they would like to take each course.

Results showed that Objectivism scores correlated negatively

with the degree to which subjects would like to take the less objective courses, $r = -.25$, $p < .03$. However, no relationship was obtained between objectivism and ratings of the highly objective courses, $r = .16$, ns.

Objective and Nonobjective Decision Criteria

In two additional studies, we asked whether high and low objectivism individuals differentially rely upon objective and nonobjective criteria when faced with decisions.

Decision criteria choices. One-hundred and twenty-one undergraduates were presented six hypothetical decisions: whether to purchase a particular car, whether to take a trip, which topic to choose for a term paper, which horse to bet on in a race, which candidate to vote for, and whether to take another job. The description of each decision was followed by several sources of information that could be considered in the process of making the decision. Some of these sources were classified a priori as objective (e.g., crime reports, expected costs, voting records) whereas others were judged to be nonobjective sources of information (e.g., one's personal feelings, horoscopes, uninformed other's opinions, prayer). Subjects were told to rate how likely they would be to use each source of information on a 5-point scale (labeled "I would definitely not consider..." to "I would definitely consider this information").

As expected, objectivism correlated positively with the degree to which subjects indicated they would rely upon objective sources of information ($r = +.29$, $p < .001$), but negatively with a reliance upon nonobjective decision-making criteria ($r = -.18$,

$p < .03$).

Decision-making. Finally, the 121 subjects in the study above read eight scenarios in which they were to imagine themselves confronted with a particular decision and with either an objective or nonobjective rationale for making the decision. Subjects were asked to indicate how likely they would be to make the decision on a 5-point scale. As predicted, objectivism scores correlated negatively with the degree to which subjects said they would make decisions based upon nonobjective rationales (such as feelings, uninformed opinions, and intuition), $r = -.23$, $p < .01$. However, Objectivism scores were not related to the degree to which subjects said they would make decisions on the basis of objective criteria (such as scientific evidence, personal observation, and statistical data).

Discussion

An 11-item scale was constructed that assesses two central characteristics of the objective person: a tendency to seek and rely upon empirically-derived information and to emphasize logical and rational considerations when making decisions. As a whole, the construct validity data demonstrate that Objectivism is associated with the tendency to enjoy thinking, with a reliance upon empirically-derived information, and with a tendency to reject subjective and intuitive styles of decision-making. The criterion validity studies showed that objectivism is associated with specific patterns of career choice and professional attitudes among psychology graduate students, with preferences for objective articles and courses, and with a greater reliance upon objective sources of information when

making decisions. We should stress that each of these studies utilized self-reports as criteria, and that future work should include behavioral and performance measures.

Three important questions regarding the nature of Objectivism emerge from this research. First, the data raise the question of whether the primary characteristic of an individual who scores high on the Objectivism Scale is "objective" or "anti-nonobjective." In other words, are high scores associated with an orientation toward objective information, with an orientation away from nonobjective information, or both?

The patterns of results suggest that, whereas objective and nonobjective individuals are often equally willing to accept and rely upon "hard," empirical information, people who score high versus low on the scale are likely to differ greatly in their evaluation of nonobjective sources of information. Specifically, low objectives should be more likely to rely upon nonobjective criteria than highly objective students. For example, in the case of graduate students rating psychological assessment techniques, it stands to reason that objective methods would be equally palatable to nearly everyone regardless of their level of objectivism, whereas nonobjective techniques are endorsed by only low objective individuals. In those instances in which objective and nonobjective sources of information are in conflict (i.e., point to different decisions or contradictory beliefs), we would expect to find that highly objective people virtually always lean toward the objective information, whereas less objective people have no systematic preference, relying upon the strongest or most

salient data. Thus, we conclude that objectivism entails both an orientation toward objective information and away from nonobjective information.

A second question regards how Objectivism should best be conceptualized. It is not clear whether Objectivism reflects a basic cognitive difference in how people attend to, encode, and process information (e.g., Mostofsky, 1970) or simply a difference in the value people place upon objective considerations when making decisions. This is a difficult question, certainly one for which we have no objective data. However, our inclination is to regard Objectivism as a preference or value. Highly objective people have learned, for one reason or another, to value objectivity and, thus, attempt to base their decisions and beliefs upon objective criteria as much as possible. Nonobjective individuals, on the other hand, do not share this orientation and may even value other considerations (such as intuition or religious insight) when faced with decisions.

Finally, it is likely that certain kinds of decisions, to be made on the basis of particular types of information, favor either objective or nonobjective decision-makers. Research is needed that explores the conditions under which objective versus nonobjective cognitive styles result in the best decisions.

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Table 1

The Objectivism Scale

Item	Item-Total Correlation
I seek as much information as possible before making decisions.	.54
I think the answers to most questions in life can be found through careful, objective analysis of the situation.	.61
I do not like to be too objective in the way I look at things (R).	.42
Trying to be highly objective and rational does not improve my ability to make good decisions (R).	.58
I see myself as a rational and objective person.	.38
After I make a decision, it is often difficult for me to give logical reasons for it (R).	.42
I gather as much information as possible before making decisions.	.53
The solution to many problems in life can <u>not</u> be found through an intellectual examination of the facts (R).	.49
I try to employ a cool-headed, objective approach when making decisions about my life.	.58
I am only confident of decisions that are made careful analysis of all available information.	.46
I tend not to be particularly objective or logical in my approach to life (R).	.40

<u>Note</u>. (R) indicates that the item is to be reverse-scored before summing. Subjects respond to each item on a 5-point scale labeled "not at all, slightly, moderately, very, and extremely characteristic of me."

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities and Correlations with Objectivism

	Mean	SD	rel	r
Need for Cognition	121.92	17.38	.89	+.47*
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator:				
Thinking Subscale	8.41	6.19	.82	+.27*
Feeling Subscale	10.41	4.91	.78	-.29*
Sensing Subscale	13.29	7.20	.82	+.17*
Intuition Subscale	10.90	5.65	.76	-.24*
Judging Subscale	15.18	6.43	.82	+.38*
Perceiving Subscale	10.39	6.02	.83	-.41*
Extraversion Subscale	14.17	5.82	.76	+.04
Introversion Subscale	12.53	6.12	.75	+.02
Subjectivism	36.71	5.04	.72	-.32*
Private Self-Consciousness	33.18	5.21	.64	+.09
Public Self-Consciousness	24.13	5.19	.82	+.22*
Objectivity-Subjectivity	70.38	7.04	.70	-.02
Social Desirability	47.25	5.16	.76	+.18*

Note. * $p < .01$

Table 3

Objectivism and Ratings of Careers in Psychology

Career	t (1,67)	Objectivism Low	Objectivism High
College or University Teaching	2.58**	5.4	6.2
Research	3.52**	3.6	5.1
Statistician	1.58*	2.2	2.9
Counseling	2.42**	6.7	6.0
Consulting	1.33*	6.2	5.1
Testing and Assessment	ns	4.0	4.2
Program Evaluator	ns	4.1	4.
Training	2.59**	5.6	4.7
Industrial-Organizational Psy.	ns	4.3	4.3

Note. * $p < .10$
** $p < .01$

Author's Note

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